



EPA approves testing plan for DuSable Park

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Optimism is rising out DuSable Park way, as Kerr-McGee officials clear the final ceremonious hurdle before suiting up and heading out to the radioactive greenspace for a little soil sampling. Simultaneously, Art Institute officials are preparing to host a public conversation with abstract sculptor Martin Puryear, chosen to create a statue of Jean Baptiste Pointe du Sable for the park.

Mike Joyce, community involvement coordinator for the Environmental Protection Agency's Chicago office, said that after some negotiation, officials there this month approved an agreement stating just how thoroughly Kerr-McGee, an Oklahoma-based energy company who inherited the task of testing DuSable Park

for thorium contamination, would examine the site.

"It had gone back and forth a couple times," said EPA spokesman Mick Hans, noting that the upcoming round of soil sampling would likely not bring the end of testing at DuSable Park.

"More than likely, the answer is, it depends on what we find out there this time," Hans said. "Typically we don't do a full-on every-possible-kind-of-testing the first time around. It's not feasible economically."

And while EPA officials have given Kerr-McGee the go-ahead, company officials are still wait-

ing for official permission from the Park District to venture out onto the three-acre peninsula located on the east side of the 400 block of North Lake Shore Drive. A formality, said Kerr-McGee spokesman Debbie Schramm, but one that must be observed.

"The EPA has approved four spots in the park for testing," Schramm said "Now we're trying to get access to the property, which is a process we have to go through. It's in the Park District's hands."

Grant Park Advisory Council President Bob O'Neill, who's long pushed for DuSable Park's devel-

opment, regarded the EPA's soil-testing green light hopefully. Until recently a dumping ground for developers excavating dirt from Streeterville building sites, DuSable Park tested positive a couple years ago for radioactivity, along with a handful of other neighborhood properties. Locals and city officials blame the long-defunct Lindsay Light Company, which until the 1930s operated an incandescent lamp factory on the lakefront, and likely spilled a goodly amount of radioactive thorium there.

"Hopefully, the testing at DuSable Park will be done this

month," O'Neill said. EPA and Kerr-McGee officials were more bashful about assigning any dates.

Meanwhile, the confident discussion of just what to put in DuSable Park once it's tested and scrubbed, continues. At 6 p.m. May 7, the Art Institute, along with the DuSable Coalition—a consortium of numerous interested groups—will host a discussion of the park's central statue. Puryear's prototype of an abstract figure in relief has drawn both praise and criticism. O'Neill said next month's confab will afford an opportunity for compromise. After all, he said,

Puryear has already been chosen and promised \$500,000 in funding. All that remains is hashing out the statue's appearance.

"It's very important that this go as smoothly as possible to get the park built," O'Neill said. "Any conflict could derail the fundraising for the park ... That's part of what's stymied the project in such a visible site ... Public and private money tends to shy away when people are not working together."

"The timing is right," O'Neill said. "We're getting closer and closer. We need to make sure people aren't going to blow this out of proportion and stymie the effort to get it done. Public art is controversial ... One thing I like to see is the Art Institute's support. That will bring greater attention to the park, because it will take private money to help build it."

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